

century. Of these students the most famous were Colet and More. Colet, too, went from Oxford, where he had learned Greek from Grocyn, to Italy in 1495, and returned in 1498 to lecture on St Paul's Epistles. We do not know for certain that he had been at Florence, though this is probable. Certain it is that he had drunk in, along with the philosophy of Ficino and Pico, something of the reforming spirit of a Savonarola. More had not the advantage of perfecting his humanist studies by an Italian tour, but he became Colet's lifelong friend, and both were the friends and helpers of Erasmus. Both, too, were practical reformers as well as scholars. Colet strove to uproot the abuses rampant in the Church, which appeared to him to have diverged far from pristine purity. "We are grieved nowadays also by heretics, men mad with marvellous foolishness," he thundered from the pulpit of St Paul's to the assembled Convocation in 1512, "but the heresies of them are not so pestilent and pernicious to us and the people as the evil and wicked lives of priests." In this sermon, which may be taken as his manifesto of reform, he did not attack doctrine. He made war on the worldliness, immorality, and ignorance of the clergy, their simony and absenteeism, their disregard of ecclesiastical law and discipline. But, while respecting tradition, he had read the New Testament in Greek at Oxford, and eschewed the schoolmen and their methods. He urged his students "to keep firmly to the Bible and the Apostles' Creed, and let the divines, if they like, dispute about the rest." He was an ardent educationist, and the school which, as Dean, he founded at St Paul's, was an essay in scholastic reform in the spirit of the new culture, chastened by the moral earnestness of the English humanist. Its pupils were accordingly to be taught, besides Latin and Greek, "the knowledge of Christ, and good Christian life and manners." The purpose and method of this educational institution, which had Lilly for its headmaster, were indeed far in advance of those of the day, which made the schoolmaster a tyrant, and his pupils the martyrs of his barbarism, ignorance, and ferocity.

Colet did not refrain from outspoken criticism of political as well as ecclesiastical abuses, and this even in the royal presence. On Good Friday, 27th March 1513, he delivered a characteristic sermon before the bellicose Henry VIII. Here